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Lord Tennyson's Pessimism.



POEMS

—ON—

“Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After.”

(Reprinted from the St. Thomas Times.)

—BY—

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and

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4.6.40

TIMES PRINT,
ST. THOMAS, ONT.

1892.

Lord Tennyson's Pessimism.



THE recent death of the Poet Laureate, Tennyson, invests his writings with new interest, and will induce many to read his poems, who have hitherto been unfamiliar with them. They will re-pay re-perusal in the case of those who are familiar with them. It is a characteristic of true greatness that it grows upon us. No one takes in Niagara at one view, or thoroughly appreciates it at a single visit. It is only after seeing the majestic scene repeatedly, and gazing at it with prolonged deliberation, that we are duly impressed with its greatness and grandeur. What is true of the magnificent works of nature, is also true of the great works of art. Illustrations of this might easily be given from the domains of painting, sculpture, music and poetry. Time, that tests all things, keeps the laurel wreaths which encircles the brow of true greatness not only always green, but ever growing.

Almost the only defect in the late Lord Tennyson's poems, is the vein of sadness and even pessimism that runs through them. It is visible in "Locksley Hall," one of his earlier compositions, written amid the bright dreams of youth, and tinged with a very deep gloom, "Locksley Hall, sixty years after." Concerning this, a writer in the Dominion Illustrated, wrote as follows, a few months ago:

"The most sanguine optimist and admirer could not fail to be tinged with sadness when the poet, more than half a century after, reviews in his sequel to "Locksley Hall" those bright "castles in Spain" his youthful imagination had constructed, and discovers that none of them were real. Tennyson regretfully shows in this poem that bitter experience and advancing age have dispelled those youthful

visions, and on every side are, he thinks, indications that the world is getting worse instead of better. The publication of this pessimistic view led to a rather spirited discussion throughout America and Europe, whilst Canada contributed her quota in the shape of a review by Rev. Dr. Dewart, of Toronto, himself no mean poet. A lofty tone of hopefulness pervaded this review, and Tennyson's attention was drawn to the fact that as we recede from past events their grossness is often glossed over in our imagination, and the present and future look corresponding dismal. Dewart's criticism of Tennyson's poems led to another Canadian minister, Rev. W. F. Clarke, then stationed at St. Thomas, Ont., taking up his literary cudgels and slashing both Tennyson and Dewart. This gentleman had not been suspected of possessing a poetic vein, but it must be confessed he put his own views in vigorous verse. I long since lost my copy of it—cut out of a newspaper at the time—but the opening stanzas have always clung to me since. The discussion in this country, ended here; but as contributions to a literary topic by Canadian authors, they certainly deserved permanent preservation."

We have much pleasure in presenting these two productions to the readers of the TIMES, by whom, notwithstanding their length, they will doubtless be read with much interest, especially at the present time.



THEN AND NOW.

A Supplemental Response to Lord Tennyson's "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" by Rev. E. H. Dewart, D.D.

Though the poet peer of England, in a faithless, mournful strain,
Sings of dark and baleful evils which o'ercast the people's reign,
Men of hopeful hearts forget not how our century has outgrown

Cruel wrongs and hateful customs that were
once on fashion's throne.

Why in every clime and period have the fearful
and the old,
Glorified the age departed as the Eden age of
gold?

Change and progress, larger freedom, which
the hand of time has brought,
Are but signs of blight and ruin by the rash
and reckless wrought.

Forms of life and truth must vary with the
spirit of the years ;
Fairest blossoms of the springtime, wither ere
the fruit appears,
Every age moulds thought and action by its
free and living mind—
Do not cast away the kernel for the roughness
of the rind.

When the hopes of youth are buoyant, and the
pulse of life keeps time
To the glad inspiring music of love's melodies
sublime,
All the world is bathed in brightness ; hope
pours balm on every smart ;
And the bleakest scenes are golden by the
sunshine in the heart.

When the fires of life burn dimly, and the false
and selfish world
Chills our hopeful trust and courage till the
flags of faith are furled,
Then the world without grows darker ; things
which once seemed good and fair
The despondent spirit colors with the hues of
its despair.

Looking backward through the ages of which
timid croakers boast,
They are black with wrongs and falsehoods,
that are now a vanished host ;
For the "good old times" embosomed brainless
follies, social crimes,
That we would not brook a moment in these
kindlier better times.

Who that shares the light and freedom, which
like blessed sunlight falls
On the peasant's lowly cottage freely as on
lordly halls,
Would go back to times of darkness e'er the
sun of freedom rose,
And renounce the wealth of blessing which
this latest age bestows ?

Then the vast and mystic forces, God through
nature has diffused
Were, alike by sage and savage, undiscovered
and unused :

Now these powers like living creatures have
been taught by human skill—
Wear man's yoke and bear his burdens, faith-
ful servants to his will.

Learning then was fortune's favor ; to the poor
by fate denied ;
Now the gates of truth and knowledge unto
all stand open wide ;
And the poor man's boy, with only honest
heart and active brain,
May evince his native kingship and the highest
rank attain.

Then the toiling and the lowly, were each
petty tyrant's scorn,
Doomed to stay with dumb submission in the
sphere where they were born ;
Now the sons of toil are honored, while their
selfish despots cower ,
For the voice of honest labor has become a
voice of power.

Then the multitude, unthinking, blindly
drank the potion given,
Took the words of human teachers as the very
words of heaven.
Only few with faith and courage, truth herself
supremely prized,
While the slaves of custom worshipped what
the past had canonized.

Now o'er truth's vast sea exploring thought's
free pennons are unfurled,
There's a mental resurrection like the spring-
time of a world.
Creed and teacher must be tested as by fire in
fiercest light,
For the question of the age is, "IS IT TRUE
AND IS IT RIGHT ?"

Law, so long the rich man's weapon, keeping
self and power secure,
Now extends its strong protection to the feeble
and the poor,
Lonely souls through all the ages, wrought
and battled in the van ;
Now the range of deeds heroic spans the
brotherhood of man.

Then, like soulless beasts of burden, men and
women bought with gold
Were by heartless christian brother into life-

long bondage sold ;
Now through every clime and country rings
the jubilant decree,
That, in spite of race and color, every human
soul is free.

Christless multitudes, unpitied, down to deeper
thralldom swept;
Left alone in guilt and darkness while the
church supinely slept ;
Now to every tribe and nation, where God's
name was never named,
Messages of free salvation are with living
power proclaimed.

Is it right, because past evils do not thwart our
present aims,
To make light of them and cover cruel wrongs
with pleasant names ?
And to slight the fruits of freedom, now to
rich and poor supplied,
Which through all those vaunted ages were
unrighteously denied ?

Why bewail the strife and struggles that disturb
this restless time
As the signs of coming chaos, which presage
decay and crime ?
All the cherished light and progress that have
lifted up the race
Have been won by throes and conflicts which
to better things gave place.

Brood not over stormy passions, surging 'round
some chronic wrong ;
High above the noise of battle, faith may hear
the victor's song.
Toil yields rest, and beauty blossoms from a
dark "unsightly root ;"
Unripe sourness is the promise of the Autumn's
ruddy fruit.

In the lives of men and nations, comes no
crown of bliss supreme,
To the stolid and slow-hearted who have
floated with the stream.
Oft the fires of ardent conflict, heavy burdens,
fiercest strife,
Lift the struggling spirit higher ; nerve and
beautify the life.

Men who weakly cringe and pander to advance
some cherished cause,
May be counted wise and prudent, win the
shallow world's applause ;
Yet I'd rather brave its hatred, standing lonely
in the fight,

And be loyal to my conscience, and to what is
true and right.

Ignorance, injustice, folly, linger still, while
myriads wait
'Till the valleys are exalted, and the crooked
paths made straight ;
But the direst ills and follies that becloud the
world to-day,
Are but shades of darker evils that have almost
passed away.

Doubtless prejudice and passion may the
restive crowds unite ;
And the blind may lead the blind, 'till they
trample on the right ;
Bitter feuds of creeds and classes find no cure
in human code ;
Men in true and Christly brotherhood, must
bear each other's load.

Rough and steep the path of progress ; slowly
earth's oppressions die ;
Yet the world is rising higher as the burdened
years go by.
Truth and righteousness, unconquered, in this
warfare shall prevail ;
This the God of truth has promised, and his
word can never fail.



"THEN AND NOW."

**A Critique on "A Supplemental Response
to Lord Tennyson's "Locksley Hall
Sixty Years After," by Rev. W. F. Clarke.**

"Poet-peer" and poet-preacher both are right
and both are wrong,
Each has truth and fact embodied in the tex-
ture of his song ;
One has wailed a minor cadence with a pathos
all his own,
While the other peals an anthem in a lofty,
major tone.

'Tis the old chameleon fable, verified in stately
verse,
In some things the world is better, while in
others it is worse ;
All depends on how you view it, in the sun-
shine or the shade,
When the flowers are blooming brightly, or
the brilliant colours fade.

Tennyson has penned no libel on the passing

age and race,
For there still are giant evils which humanity
disgrace ;
Tis a life-like picture truly that his artist hand
has sketched,
Though his sorrowful examples may be here
and there far-fetched.

Dewart, too, has conjured up no fanciful,
poetic dream ;
In the signs of modern progress he has made
his cheerful theme,
All is true to human nature, and to present,
real life,
But, as ever, good and evil are engaged in
deadly strife.

Which, upon the whole is mightier, who has
light enough to say ?
Does the twilight tend to evening or to bright
meridian day,
Are they gathering glooms that presage an
approaching, dismal night,
Or dispelling shadows, vanishing before a
morning bright ?

Many hoary wrongs departed, tell of progress
on those lines,
And, of social peace and comfort, there are
many hopeful signs,
But the old oppressions linger, though in new
and modern forms,
And the heavens are black with cloud-banks
that betoken coming storms.

Lo ! the European nations, always armed for
deadly strife,
While with wars and rumors of them, all the
foreign air is rife,
Britain torn with wild convulsion, law and
order set at naught,
And the wisest statesmen living, with perplex-
ity distraught.

Science has yoked up the forces which
through nature are diffused,
And they lie no longer idle, dormant powers
by man unused,
But monopolists and nabobs, pouncing on them
as their prey,
Reproduce the wrongs and hardships of a by-
gone feudal day.

Coat of armour, bow and arrow, glittering
sword and pointed spear,
Old-time weapons of rude warfare from the
conflict disappear,

Acts of Parliament and charters now empower
the favoured few,
At their wills to fleece the many, just as barons
used to do.

Scholarship and education in these days are
free to all,
But they do not rid the masses of their former
captive thrall,
They are like "dumb driven cattle," forced,
though much against their will,
To obey tyrannic masters and submit to bond-
age still.

Is it now the burning question, in this age
of vaunted light,
What the poet preacher tells us, "Is it true
and is it right ?"
Rather do not men and women in our much
enlightened day,
Ask on every mooted subject, "IS IT SAFE
AND WILL IT PAY ?"

It is well the poet preacher holds the standards
of his church
Otherwise he soon would be, a theologian in
the lurch ;
Robbed of pulpit, standing, stipend, easy
editorial chair,
In a far-off country exiled, empty husks his
daily fare.

Not a decade yet has vanished since a Method-
ist divine,
Add a Presbyterian preacher, stars that bright
with lustre shine,
Had to eat their words incautious, to escape
sectarian ban,
Just because they dared to venture too far
forward in the van.

Still "the multitude" unheeding blindly "drink
the potion given,"
Take the words of human teachers as the very
words of heaven,
Only few, with faith and courage, truth her-
self supremely prize,
While the slaves of pious custom, still the dead
past canonize.

Still, men meekly cringe and pander to
advance some selfish cause,
And are counted wise and prudent, win the
shallow world's applause,
Who dares brave its cruel hatred, standing
lonely in the fight,
Loyal evermore to conscience, and to what si

true and right ?

Still, like soulless beasts of burden, men and
women bought with gold,
Are by heartless Pope and Mammon into life-
long bondage sold,
Not the body merely, we with ignominious
fetter bind,
But that better nature which we proudly call
"the immortal mind."

Christless multitudes unpitied down to deeper
thralldom sweep,
Left alone in guilt and darkness, while the
angels look and weep,
For, beneath the eaves of churches, heathen
perish day by day,
Though we ply our mission labors, to the
countries far away.

See the social evil rampant, as it never was of
yore,
Tramps, and waifs, and drunkards, wandering
past the sanctuary door;
Poverty and want uncared for, while the
wealthy hoard their pelf,
And devote their lavish thousands, to the
pampering of self.

And while all these evils fester in the body
politic,
Rank hypocrisy apparent, makes the burdened
heart grow sick.
People doubt the saintliness that, passing on
the other side,
Asks, "Who is my neighbor?" with a tone and
air of cant and pride.

Oh ! it seems an endless æon that we have to
hope and wait,
Till the valleys are exalted and the crooked
paths made straight;

Is the world's mellenium nearer than it was an
age ago,
When so many signs and portents seem aloud
to answer "No?"

Happy those who 'mid the chaos, feel that
things are ripening up
To the time when all the starving shall enjoy
their "bit and sup,"
Every form of moral evil sink into oblivion
deep,
Balm be given to hearts that ache, and glad-
ness dawn on eyes that weep.

Nothing short of love's enthronement in the
hearts and lives of men,
Will bring back to earth's bleak desert, "Para-
dise Restored" again,
And, the golden rule established, brotherhood
and concord find
Universal welcome in the haunts and homes of
all mankind.

If this "golden age" is coming, yea is at our
every door,
Sudden social revolutions must be for the
world in store,
Great upheavals, moral earthquakes, cyclones
of resistless might,
That shall swallow up the evil, and aloft uplift
the right.

Not by tardy gain of inches can ten thousand
leagues of space,
Be recovered from usurpers who afflict the
human race,
Let us pray that God Almighty, will upon the
scene descend,
And consign its desolations to a quick, per-
petual end !
St. Thomas, March 8, 1888.

